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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7549
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 8787
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3448
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 9940
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 5684
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 4460
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS ISLAMABAD 002245

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: BY ELECTION RESULTS IN PAKISTAN

REF: ISLAMABAD

11. (SBU) Summary: Despite some violence and procedural irregularities, voting in the June 26 by-Elections was held in a generally free and fair environment. Turnout was reportedly 32%. As expected, the ruling coalition swept the polls. Both the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) did well in their respective provincial strongholds of Punjab and Sindh, but Nawaz Sharif's PML-N outpolled the PPP in both the center and the critical Punjab. In the National Assembly, the PML-N now has 95 of 342 seats to the PPP's 125. Musharraf's party did not win any seats in the election. End Summary

12. (U) On June 26, 2008, by-elections were held for five National Assembly and 28 Provincial Assembly seats. In the National Assembly, the PML-N won three seats, and PPP won two seats. The PML-N now has 95 of 342 total seats in the National Assembly; the PPP now has 125.

13. (U) According to the Election Commission, in the Punjab Provincial Assembly, PML-N won ten seats; the PPP won four; an independent won one seat. In Sindh, the PPP increased its seats by three. In the Northwest Frontier Province, the PPP, the Awami National Party and independents won two seats each, and the PML-N won one seat. In Balochistan, the PPP took one seat; independents won two.

14. (U) On June 25, the Supreme Court agreed to postpone the election in PLM-N leader Nawaz Sharif's constituency until it could rule on the decision of Lahore High Court to declare Nawaz ineligible to run. The Court is scheduled to take up the issue on June 30. If Nawaz is allowed to contest, PML-N is expected to win.

15. (U) According to the Election Commission, the election turnout was approximately 32%. In comments to the media, Election Commission Secretary Dilshad claimed that 1,000 foreign and domestic observers observed the election and declared the arrangements as satisfactory. FAFEN, the domestic election observer group funded by USAID through a grant to The Asia Foundation, monitored the elections and noted some irregularities.

REPORTED VIOLENCE & IRREGULARITIES

16. (U) Sporadic incidents of violence were reported in Jahanian, where PPP supporters allegedly resorted to aerial firing in a bid to keep their opponent's voters away from polling station. Police arrested five men who were later released. Nine people were reported injured because of firing.

17. (U) Three people were reported injured in Samundari near Faisalabad; five people were injured in Bahawalnagar when PPP and

PML-N supporters clashed. A case was registered against PPP's candidate for allegedly harassing a presiding officer and attempting to case 350 fake votes at gunpoint.

¶18. (U) In Mandi Bahauddin, supporters of PPP's provincial assembly candidate reportedly kidnapped an assistant presiding officer and ran away with ballot boxes from five polling stations. The opposition Pakistan Muslim League Party alleged that its candidate was winning with a lead of 4,000 but after the recovery of the presiding officer and the polling boxes, the PPP's candidate was declared as the winner.

¶19. (U) Women were prevented from voting in Mardan, Northwest Frontier Province, where the PPP's candidate was elected. In a discussion with an Election Commission official, PolFSN was told that women were prohibited from voting "under a local arrangement and understanding" between the contesting candidates.

¶10. (SBU) Comment: The results show that both PML-N and PPP expanded their dominance in their respective home provinces of Punjab and Sindh. Nawaz Sharif's "go Musharraf go" campaign helped him slightly expand his strength vis a vis the PPP in the National Assembly; more important for future elections, PML-N's lock on the Punjab heartland grew. Musharraf's party won no seats at all. The next election, an indirect election for the Senate, is scheduled for March 2009.

PATTERSON